Durham University
Department of Sport and Exercise Sciences

Inspiring the extraordinary

Facts and Figures:

Cumulative Injuries and longer lasting impacts

Thank you very much for taking part in the UK Rugby Health Project and for your continued support.

The results from the first study are published in the journal, Sports Medicine http://dro.dur.ac.uk/31049/. Our research engaged with 189 UK-based rugby players (83 elite and 106 amateur, RU and RL) and 65 UK-based non-contact athletes from sports such as cricket.

The key findings were:

1. The average age of retirement was 33 in elite rugby players, 36 in amateur rugby players and 42 in non-contact athletes.
2. Concussion was the most frequently reported injury and had the highest recurrence. 81% of elite rugby players and 76% of amateur rugby players reported experiencing at least one concussion during their careers.
3. In rugby players, the injuries most likely to lead to retirement were concussion, upper limb fracture, disc rupture, ACL tear, meniscus tear or back injury. In non-contact athletes, back injury was most likely to lead to retirement.
4. Retired rugby players were 1.7 - 7.3 times more likely to report a given injury and 2.4 - 9.7 times more likely to report continued impact from a given injury, compared to non-contact athletes.
5. Retired elite rugby players reported a median of 39 injuries per player and retired amateur players reported 23 injuries per player. These rates were significantly greater than those for non-contact athletes who reported 7.3 injuries per athlete.
6. Knee ligament injuries and back injuries were also reported to occur at a high rate in retired rugby players, and were associated with longer lasting impacts.
7. In retired elite rugby players, the prevalence of osteoarthritis was more than double that of retired non-contact athletes (51% v 22%), and was linked to previous joint injuries and surgery.
8. Current back pain and severe and regular joint pain were high in all former athletes (64%), particularly former elite rugby players (80%).
9. Injuries occurred more frequently in elite rugby players compared with amateur players suggesting there is no injury type for which there is a protective effect as skill level increases. Instead, a greater intensity of play, greater exposure to risk, and the financial need or desire to return to play, are likely to be more plausible explanations.

For the full research paper please visit: http://dro.dur.ac.uk/31049/
or if you would like more information email: karen.hind@durham.ac.uk